

# Annual Meeting

## Financial Mechanism 2014-2021

### EEA GRANTS, PORTUGAL

### Oporto, October 8<sup>th</sup> 2019

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According to Article 2.7 of the Regulation on the implementation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM) 2014-2021, the second Annual Meeting between the **Financial Mechanism Committee (FMC)** and the **National Focal Point (NFP)** was held in Oporto on October 8<sup>th</sup> 2019.

On behalf of the Portuguese delegation the meeting was chaired by Mrs. **Susana Ramos**, Coordinator of the National Management Unit, appointed as National Focal Point (**NFP**).

Mrs. **Pia Gjesme Holm**, Deputy Director at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA), co-chaired the meeting on behalf of the **Donors**.

The meeting was also attended by Mr. **Anders Erdal**, Ambassador of Norway to Portugal, Mr. **Kristjan Andri Stefansson**, Ambassador of Iceland to Portugal, and Mr. **Henning Stiro**, Director of the FMO as well as other representatives from the Norwegian and Portuguese Ministries for Foreign Affairs, the Audit Authority, the Certifying Authority, the Programme Operators (PO) and NGO Fund Manager.

A full list of participants is attached to the present minutes. These minutes summarize the main issues discussed.

## Opening statements by NFP and FMC

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**Susana Ramos**, opened the meeting with a welcome address to all participants, including mentioning of the relevance of holding the meeting in Oporto in the very room where the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement was signed in 1992. The agreement entered into force in 1994 and therefore celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**Pia Gjesme Holm**, on behalf of the Donors, thanked the NFP for the opportunity for holding the Annual Meeting in this impressive room with such symbolic importance and the planned events celebrating the 25 years' anniversary of the EEA Agreement. Strong bilateral relations are appreciated by the Donors and the close collaboration with the Norwegian Embassy in Lisbon is noted. The NFP professionalism was paramount to the successful completion of the 09-14 Financial Mechanism (FM) and the management set-up of the 2014-2021 FM.

**Anders Erdal**, stated the positive cooperation and the good progress since the last Annual Meeting with all programmes now having open calls launched and some projects ongoing which

is a clear indication that the implementation will be of very high level and meet current challenges faced in the ocean and the environment, among others.

**Kristjan Andri Stefansson** referred the long standing trade relations with Portugal and the wonderful opportunities for collaboration that transcend into a broader scope, such as the geothermal project implemented in Azores which was the largest project with collaboration of Iceland under the EEA Grants, the Gender Equality Event in Iceland taking place on 31 Oct-1 Nov with the support of the Portuguese Fund for Bilateral Relations (FBR) and the PO and DPP of the Work-Life Balance Programme. Iceland is also looking forward to working with Portugal under the Blue Growth Programme.

## Strategic Report 2019 – Presentation and Discussions

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**Susana Ramos** started by highlighting the main milestones over the reporting period such as:

- Conclusion of discussions on concept notes from May 2018 to January 2019 and signature of all the Programme Agreements from January to May 2019;
- The public event to give notice of the new joint website for the EEA Grants in Portugal and the public launch of the FBR Open Call in December 2018;
- All Programmes launched open calls and
- The beginning of the technical work in July 2019 on the requirements for the public tender for the joint Information Platform for the EEA Grants in Portugal with the NFP, the Certifying Authority and the 4 Programme Operators together with the joint contracted consultant.

**Pia Gjesme Holm** stated as general comments that the Strategic Report 2019 is well written and reflects the current state of affairs. It can be therefore considered as approved.

The **Donors** valued the quality at entry in the preparation of the programmes and are very pleased with all the Programme Agreements signed in Portugal, looking forward for the positive impacts.

**Henning Stiro** was invited to comment on the Strategic Report and the updated information provided: the guideline on the Management and Control Systems provided by the NFP to the Programme Operators was welcomed, as well as the update on the submission of the descriptions at Programme level; highlighted that the operationalization of the Results Framework will give important information and is an important tool for risk management and report on results, very important to be referred to in the open call text. Monitoring on Programmes should focus on results and expect a shift beyond monitoring on compliance to be expressed on the next Strategic Report next year.

Furthermore, as stated in the Strategic Report 2019, the **MoU Amendments** were identified as issues for the Annual Meeting (page 17). Following the new government that will be formed after the general elections that took place on October 6<sup>th</sup> 2019, some minor adjustments, either in Annex A and Annex B, may be needed due to organic readjustments of the new government to the designated entities. FMO will keep close contact with the NFP and follow up this issue.

### a) National management set-up

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On the description of the Management and Control Systems at national level it was noted that in June 2018 the FMO stated the compliance of the national description of the Management and Control Systems, providing conditions for the first advance payments.

On the descriptions of the MCS at Programme level the updated information is that by August the Work-Life Balance, Culture, Environment Programmes submitted their descriptions to the Audit Authority and that the Blue Growth Programme is expected to submit its MCS by October. Information on the several joint Seminars to POs promoted by the NFP was given which is considered essential for the good implementation of different aspects of the Financial Mechanism. Attention was also drawn to the first round of dedicated monitoring meetings that took place with each PO in July with plans to have the next round of meetings in November.

## b) Status of the Fund for Bilateral Relations

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Discussion on the Fund for Bilateral Relations highlighted the status of 4 approved pre-defined initiatives, the results from the FBR Open Call so far, the use of the FBR by the Programmes and the work of JCBF.

Relevance was given to the high interest that was generated by the **FBR Open Call #1**. Until the 2nd cut-off date that happened by 12th September, a total of 33 valid applications were received – 24 on the first cut-off date and 9 on the second. The JCBF decided to reinforce the initial total allocation for this open call from €200.000 to €600.000. The 11 approved applications from the first cut-off date committed a total of -€145 905. The holiday period can justify the difference in applications received in the 1<sup>st</sup> compared with the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off date. The JCBF will appraise the 9 applications from the 2<sup>nd</sup> cut-off date at the next meeting on October 9<sup>th</sup> in Lisbon. The NFP continues to receive several requests for information so it is expected to maintain a high level of interest and receive a high number of applications by the 3<sup>rd</sup> cut-off date foreseen to take place by January 2020.

On the **Programmes' MoU allocations of the FBR**, the total amount of €500.000 was transferred to the Programme Operators by December 2018 after the signature of a formal contract setting the terms and conditions on the use of the FBR by Programmes including the reporting responsibilities. Although the incurred expenditure reported to date is not significant, several initiatives eligible for the FBR allocations on Programmes took place between early 2018 and during the current year 2019, mainly on matchmaking events and study trips to detail the identified partnerships in pre-defined projects with the Donor Project Partners.

On the **works of the JCBF** it was noted that the first meeting was held by February 2018 and will hold its 6th meeting on October 9th 2019. The meetings are usually set in venues related with financed projects, such as the case of the Monserrate Palace, in Sintra (rehabilitated under the 2004-2009 FM) or the case of the Mar Portugal Vessel stationed at Almada or the Museu Damião de Gois at Alenquer (both supported under the previous FM 2009-2014). Fruitful discussions on the FBR Work Plan, pre-defined initiatives and the Open Call led to timely and active implementation of the FBR.

**Pia Gjesme Holm** commented that continued close cooperation is expected and welcomed the regular meetings held by the JCBF in Portugal that is considered useful. The importance of cooperation and regular communication with the DPPs in all programmes was particularly highlighted. The Donors expect strategic and focused use of the bilateral funds.

**Susana Ramos** was invited to comment on the positive assessment of the open call approach to which the broad and large scope generated with very high and diverse interest was highlighted, given ground for the increase of the original amount allocated (from €200.000 to €600.000).

### c) Communication

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Under the Communication Strategy, the NFP has carried out various **communication activities** some of which were highlighted:

- The presence in the social media with consistent increase of number of followers;
- The results of standard survey for the awareness of the EEA Grants in Portugal conducted in 2018 (4%) that is a baseline to assess our communication efforts through this period;
- The dissemination of the EEA Grants promoted by the NFP in several ways such as (i) invited speakers in public events, (ii) through the promotion of informative sessions will all PO in a roadshow that covered all regions in Portugal including Madeira and Azores and abroad in Iceland, (iii) several meetings at the NFP or by Skype aiming to have a broad outreach beyond Lisbon where the NFP is based;
- The joint website supporting a clear and effective communication of the EEA Grants in Portugal where stakeholders can find in one place access to all relevant information on the EEA Grants in Portugal;
- The EEA Grants APP - available for Android and Ios, with push notifications for Open Calls and for any other relevant information and recently with a partner match functionality.

The NFP has an excellent collaborative working routine on communication with the Norway Embassy in Lisbon. From this collaboration it was highlighted some examples:

- EEA Grants Tuesday - the EEA Grants Portugal joins the Embassy's #eeagrantsuesday initiative. Projects are presented in English in Embassy's Facebook and in Portuguese at EEA Grants Portugal;
- Instagram Photo contest launched by the Embassy and actively promoted by social media of EEA GRANTS Portugal;
- The 25 year EEA Agreement Media Prize Contest jointly with the Embassy and that runs until the 3<sup>rd</sup> November this year;
- 7 short films on the EEA GRANTS on each Programme including the Active Citizens Fund and the Fund for Bilateral Relations (all with versions in English and in Portuguese and subtitles).

For the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EEA Agreement the NFP have promoted 3 main activities:

- The already mentioned 25 year EEA Agreement Media Prize Contest,
- The Evocative Event that takes place this afternoon in this same room,
- The 25 year/25 projects Photo Exhibition that will be official opened tomorrow in Lisbon in the metro Station Alameda that received in the past on the first supports to Portugal under the EEA Grants (25 M€ in 1994-1998).

**Pia Gjesme Holm** congratulated the NFP for the creativity and for the innovative approach with the APP and how the EEA Grants are perceived as a brand. The videos and the events to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary [of the EEA Agreement] were also mentioned. Portugal is considered a good example and the Donors commend the NFP for the creativity and for the good collaboration with the Embassy. **Pia Gjesme Holm** also underlined the NFP to make sure that the EEA Grants brand are adequately recognized in all promotional activities including at programme-level.

#### d) Status of Programmes

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**Susana Ramos** gave the floor to the representatives of each Programme Operator and the NGO Fund Manager to present a brief status on the progress of the Programmes.

All Programmes reported on the launched open calls and on the dates for the remaining ones, as well as, on the status of the pre-defined projects. Special focus was made on the bilateral initiatives with all programmes reporting matchmaking events linked with open calls and study trips for preparation of pre-defined projects.

**Pia Gjesme Holm** welcomed the full speed registered in all programmes and the strong importance given to bilateral relations. On the Blue Growth and on the Environment Programmes, the high expectation of results from the Donors was noted.

On the Work-Life Balance Programme the importance of the thematic area for the Donors as key values was highlighted.

On the Culture Programme the ambition of the Programme was commended and the news that funds have been secured for the Arts Council to continue as DPP in the Programme were announced.

The close cooperation between PO/DPPs was referred to as a significant aspect valued by the Donors.

The FMO also provided a brief status on the Regional Fund:

- youth employment - project implementation started- 11 PT entities involved, one of which as lead partner;
- regional cooperation – assessment of over 700 outline applications. In the final round, 3 PT (1 as lead partner) project applications are being assessed – selection expected concluded by the end of the year.

#### Risk Assessment

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In a restricted session where the PO and NGO Fund Manager were not participants, the risk assessment provided in the Strategic Report was discussed.

In particular, the NFP highlighted the good progress on the Culture Programme that on the last report and meeting generated the highest concerns and now shows the lower risk level. The concerns over the higher risk on the Blue Growth Programme that were already discussed by the NFP with the PO were noted.

**Pia Gjesme Holm** conveyed that the Donors fully agree with the risk assessment presented and the donors willingness to provide support where contributions can be made.

**Henning Stiro** once again mentioned the importance of monitoring and referred that training was equally important to mitigate risks in all areas. Portugal has identified results management as a training need. The FMO will assist on that and is available to support in any way.

**Susana Ramos** agreed with the importance of training and highlighted the interest on exchange of experience with other stakeholders. The NFP has been actively providing training to POs and soon a new training on Corruption and Fraud Risks Assessment and Prevention will be provided by the national Court of Auditors to all POs. Training provided by the FMO to the Audit and

Certifying Authorities are considered very relevant and the participation of the NFP in such trainings is considered very relevant for the NFP.

## Any Other Business

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**Susana Ramos** introduced the issue of the **allocation of the reserve** to understand the best way to start the process and how to proceed at this stage considering that by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 a proposal shall be sent by Portugal.

**Pia Gjesme Holm** informed that the Donors will have to perform a Mid-Term review to assist on the assessment for the allocations of the Reserve. For this the FMO will prepare a template which will be basis for negotiation. Decisions may be taken later than 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. Portugal is one of the most advanced beneficiary countries in implementation, which will make the process easier.

**Pia Gjesme Holm** introduced the issue of the Forecasts of Likely Payments (FLP) to convey the concerns of the Donors Ministries of Finance regarding the significant deviation from the Financial Reports. The importance given by the Donors to the FLP was underlined.

Finally, **Pia Gjesme Holm** referred to the assessment on the programme development phase that will be undertaken by the FMO either late 2019 or early 2020, to which the NFP and PO will be invited to contribute.

## Sum-up and conclusions

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**Susana Ramos** to conclude the meeting highlighted the following:

- Good status on the management set-up, on the programmes' implementation and on the use of the Fund for Bilateral Relations;
- The importance of IT System for the EEA Grants in Portugal;
- The good collaboration with the Embassy and POs on communication issues;
- The MoU Amendments that can proceed after formal communication from the FMO;
- Training to continue to be promoted with the FMO support.

**Pia Gjesme Holm** congratulated Portugal for the good work. Compared with other Financial Mechanisms there is more time for implementation. With all Programme Agreements signed Portugal has a better chance to deliver. The Donors appreciate the good cooperation fostered and expect to see results with more in-depth discussions next year together with a visit to an ongoing project. The FMO is ready to provide support at all levels.

After thanking the participants **Susana Ramos** invited all to join the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event in the afternoon and "Photo Exhibition 25 years /25 projects" tomorrow in Lisbon.

The meeting was closed by 13.00.

### List of Participants

	<b>Representative</b>	<b>Entity</b>	<b>Presence</b>
1.	Alexandra Carvalho	Secretary General for Environment and Energy Transition (SGMATE)	Confirmed
2.	Ana Senha	Directorate General for the Arts (DGARTES)	Confirmed
3.	Anders Erdal	Ambassador of Norwegian Embassy in Lisbon	Confirmed
4.	Anne Gjørztz	Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs	Confirmed
5.	Anne Myrjord	Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs	Confirmed
6.	Conceição Santos	Directorate-General for Maritime Policy (DGPM)	Confirmed
7.	Filipa Rodrigues	National Focal Point	Confirmed
8.	Henning Stiro	Financial Mechanism Office (FMO)	Confirmed
9.	Joana Marteleira	National Focal Point	Confirmed
10.	Kristjan Andri Stefansson	Ambassador of Iceland for Portugal	Confirmed
11.	Luís Madureira Pires	Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation	Confirmed
12.	Luísa Fragoso de Almeida	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PT)	Confirmed
13.	Mafalda Ramos	Directorate General for Cultural Heritage (DGPC)	Confirmed
14.	Manuel Albano	Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG)	Confirmed
15.	Maria João Lois	National Focal Point	Confirmed
16.	Mualla Cirakli	Financial Mechanism Office (FMO)	Confirmed
17.	Paula Caldas	Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG)	Confirmed
18.	Paula Silva	Directorate General for Cultural Heritage (DGPC)	Confirmed

19.	Pia Gjesme Holm	Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Confirmed
20.	Ricardo Perdigão	National Focal Point	Confirmed
21.	Rita Soares	National Focal Point	Confirmed
22.	Rogério Martins	Development and Cohesion Agency	Confirmed
23.	Rui Ribeiro	General Inspectorate of Finance	Confirmed
24.	Sandra Silva	Directorate-General for Maritime Policy (DGPM)	Confirmed
25.	Susana Graça	Norwegian Embassy in Lisbon	Confirmed
26.	Susana Ramos	National Focal Point	Confirmed
27.	Torill Johansen	Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs	Confirmed